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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of a pedagogic strategy which involved the development of descriptive tactics and individual exploration into the meanings and significance of photographic images was investigated. An additional purpose of the study was to reveal methods which enhanced student responses toward photographs, and their production, function, and value in educational and cultural settings. As part of the New York State Summer School for the Arts, 23 high school students were selected for a 6-week intense photography workshop. Students participated in Stewart's model for critical dialogue, and photographic projects encouraging individualistic response and exploration. Pre- and post-surveys were administered to determine changes in attitude and judgmental processes, and reactions to the photographs of Diane Arbus were noted to determine conceptual shifts. Study findings revealed deviations in the students' judgmental criteria (their process for defining good and bad photographs) and in thinking about the photographic medium. Results suggest that conceptual shifts can be facilitated by structuring the psychological learning environment, and that development of a critical dialogue model may enhance students' verbal responses to photographs. More research concerning critical processes and conceptual development is needed. (Author/LMM)

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A MODEL FOR CRITICAL DIALOGUE:

A Study for Enhancing Student Response to Visuals

by

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A MODEL FOR CRITICAL DIALOGUE: A Study For Enhancing student Response to Visuals

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ABSTRACT:

Twenty three high school age students were selected for a six week intense photography workshop as part of the New York State Summer School for the Arts. The students were studied for conceptual shifts and attitiude modification toward the medium. Students participated in Stewart's model for critical dialogue, and photographic projects encouraging individualistic response and exploration. Pre and post surveys were administred to determine changes in attitude and judgmental processes. Reaction to the photographs of Diane Arbus were noted to determine conceptual shifts. The results of the study revealed deviations in the students judgmental criteria (process for defining good and bad photographs) and in thinking about the photographic medium. The study suggests that more research in the area of critical processes and conceptual development is needed. The study also makes suggestions for a pedagogy of media.

PROBLEM

Many educational practices in instructional technology and media rely, upon conventualized standards for the judgment of work. When this occurs the individual's freedom to explore and

to respond to internal and external stimuli, in an independent nature, is restricted. Using media to teach reading, improve math skills or provide experiences for a creative writing class is a limited and bounded conception of media within the educational technology paradigm.

Defining how a medium is to be used within an educational context creates the medium itself. This is demonstrated through the development of educational films and television, and now computers. The language used to create the technology not only defines it, but it establishes our relationship to it, and it to us. The resistance to educational television was not to the content of the programs, but to the definition of the technology as being a replacement for teachers, being more effective in selected environments than teachers, and being teacher safe.

Attitudes, beliefs and values about media are similarly defined by the language which surrounds them. What establishes a "good" or a "bad" photograph is closely aligned with a belief structure about what a photograph should look like, what its function is, and what its relationship is to other photographs and pictures. Seldom is the literature of educational technology concerned with the issues of an image's signifiance and the individual's relationship to the image created or examined. If media education is included within the educational technology paradigm then attitudes toward media within an educational context, must be reconsidered.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of a pedagogic strategy which involved the development of descriptive tactics and individual exploration into the meanings and significance of photographic images. It was hoped that the study would begin to reveal methods which enhanced student responses toward photographs, their production, function and value in educational and culutral settings.

METHODOLOGY

Traditionally the teaching of photography at the secondary level has expressed two concerns: The first concerns is the teaching of career or professional skills, which addresses the medium of photography in terms of a product-market relationship. Most photography at this level stresses the reproduction of a commercialized product. The second concern is for the development of technical skills, that is making a good print. Again, the reproductive attitude is aspired to. Emulation of Ansel Adams, Eastmen Kodak, the regional photography club,and the community professional are part of the high school student's introduction to photography. This is an introduction that affects his/her attitudes and understanding of the medium and its political and economic signifiance.

In an effort to form a broader concept of media, in all of its symbolic forms, this study employed the Stewart Model for

Critical Diaglogue and selected divergent photographic assignments. Pre and post tests were employed to notate shifts in attitude and conceptual levels. The photographic work of Diane Arbus was presented to determine conceptual links to the critical model provided.

STEWART'S MODEL FOR CRITICAL DIALOGUE

The model provided by Doug Stewart (Stewart,1976) is non-judgemental and categorical. His model calls for the elimination of all judgmental terms and the creation of an open and risk free environment for the discussion of images. The model provides three categories for response; judgmental, formal or visual, and poetic. In this study we added a fourth: political. After discussing each variable and its parameters with the students, the judgemental category was eliminated. Discussions of all assignments were in keeping with Stewart's Model.

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments ambiguous in nature, were given with minimal definition of expectations. They included self-portraits, a social statement, significant form, dreams and illusions, and "three feet or less". After finishing each project of approximately 8-15 prints, the students formed triads to discuss their work. After that, all work was displayed and discussed within the categories of Stewart's model. Students were

negatively answered by their peers when they incorporated judgmental terminology.

Diane Arbus

The work of Diane Arbus (Arbus,1972) was presented once each week for six weeks with no discussion allowed about the work. After the post-survey on Arbus's work a full morning discussion was held. The objective behind this method was to determine if Stewart's model for critical dialogue, the class assignments and discussions affected the student's conceptual framework and level of cognition employed to give meaning to Arbus's work.

STUDENTS

Twenty-three students for the program were selected by the following criteria: 1) race; 2) age (giving preference to seniors); 3) gender; 4) photographic ability. Sixteen of the students ranged between 17 and 18 years of age; 6 were from urban areas, 12 from suburban, and 5 from rural areas. Eleven students had one year of photographic instruction, with one having more than five years. Seventeen students said they only received instruction in a school setting,five were self-taught, and one attended classes at a community center. Fifteen students saw their involvement with photography as both artistic and career centered. Seven considered it only as an art form, and one considered it only in the light of a career. The students came to the program with a wide range of interest and abilities. Each

brought an understanding and expectation of the workshop and the medium.

INSTRUMENTS

A survey was designed to gather background information and to assess current practices and attitudes toward the medium. In surveying attitudes an open format was followed. Data were obtained through the selection of language to answer questions. Categories were then created from the student responses, and comparisions made.

DATE ANALYSIS

In the analysis of the data, movements and shifts in attitudes and rational were looked-for. Comparisions were made between pre and post-survey data. We observed the following through the collected data, that:

1. There was a movement toward a concern for making meaningful photographs.
2. Student rationale for making photographs evinced a shift toward communications and away from creativity.
3. Student discussion of the meaning of photographs demonstrated movement away from reflection and creativity as a major focus to more defused responses which included careers and individual perception.

4 When students addressed the importance of the medium they evinced a movement toward photography as a form of expression.

5. In defining what is a good photograph the pre and post-survey showed no differences. The primary reason given was for its message/meaning capablities.

6. Students definition of a bad photograph shifted from reasons of commonality/non-creativity to a rationale of no definition.

ARBUS SURVEY RESULTS

The Diane Arbus photographs were shown once each week for six weeks, with no discussion before or after each showing. The pre-survey was administered immediately after the first showing. The survey was administered immediately after the sixth and final showing. Categories were formed from the student's replies to the survey. Again a number of interesting perceptual shifts occured. The students, in discussing their responses to Arbus's work demonstrated a movement away from emotional and contextual referents. In the pre-survey there was a marked tendency to discuss individual photographs. The post-survey disclosed a move toward the relationship between images. In discussing the major idea of the work students responded to pre-survey questions by demonstrating an avoidance of the question, whereas on the post-survey they offered a range of responses. The reference to the organizational structure was of critical nature. The responses to this last question on the meaning of Arbus's work, the

student's responses suggested a conceptual shift in the rationalizing of Arbus's work.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study revealed a number of interesting considerations for teachers of media. The study suggested that by structuring the psychological learning environment conceptual shifts can occur. It also suggested that conceptualization in one activity could be crossed over to another activity which becomes an important consideration for educators when using media in their curriculum. The study also suggested that the development of a critical dialogue model for students may enhance verbal responses to photographs. The study also suggests that more study in this area is needed.

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